

A Radio Pioneer

By: Norm Schrein

Editor's note:

Some years ago we ran a story about radio pioneer Barry Goldwater. With his passing at the end of May we felt our readers might want to read again about this former Air Force General, United States Senator, Presidential Candidate and Amateur Radio Operator. This story was taken from "Emergency Radio" — Scanning news as it happens, which is published by Index Publishing Group, Inc.

If you remember the 1960's then you remember Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona. It was Barry who was the fiery Republican who ran against Lyndon B. Johnson for President in 1964. It was also this senator who was the ranking Republican on many a committee in Washington, including committees dealing with electronic communications.

During the Vietnam war Senator Goldwater, also known to ham radio operators as K7UGA, lent the use of his well-equipped radio shack to members of MARS (Military Affiliate Radio Service). During the Vietnam era, the radio shack was manned, many times for twenty-four hour periods, by volunteers who worked to pass radio messages to and from the troops stationed in a country more than 12 time zones away from their homes and families.

Senator Goldwater, in addition to being an avid ham radio operator, is also a retired Air Force General. There were many times he went to Vietnam to visit with the troops and get first hand reports on the action there.

Now in the 1990's the "Senator" has retired to his Paradise Valley home near Scottsdale, Arizona. Many of the memorabilia from the 60's are still there. Inside his ham shack is a wall covered with autographed photos — a kind of who's who of the 1960's. Some photos draw the viewer directly to them, like the one of JFK signed in appreciation to Senator Goldwater, and another one of Lyndon Johnson that was signed "from your favorite target."

I asked the "Senator" about some bomb fragments displayed on a nearby shelf. He said, "One time when I was visiting in Saigon, our hotel was receiving motor fire and the shell fragments are from that incident." I asked what he did during the incident and he replied, "I got the hell out of there." This, I thought to myself, is the Senator Goldwater I remembered from the 1960's. He is still very feisty and not afraid to tell it like it is.

The radio room of K7UGA is also like a who's who of radio equipment. There are some vintage pieces as well as other more current editions of communications gear. The "Senator" still has a swivel chair at his operating position well within reach of a chrome plated microphone. He readily invites guests to have a seat at the radio operator's position with him. "I don't get on the air much any more," he said. But it was easy to see that he still has a real interest in radio communications. He can still explain just about every piece of equipment in the room and tell you where he got it as well.

Senator Barry Goldwater is a pioneer of sorts to the radio world. He is certainly an important part of the Amateur Radio Community, but it is not widely known that during his terms in the Senate, he was able to successfully fend off many an anti-receiver law. Many radio enthusiasts know about the recent ECPA (Electronic Communications Privacy Act) of 1986 and the more recent law forc-

ing scanner manufacturers to remove cellular coverage from their scanners, but the attacks on those who choose to freely listen to the airwaves has long been underway. Senator Goldwater was able to beat back most of the attempts in the past. Now radio enthusiasts are trying to find another champion to fill his shoes. It is not going to be an easy task.

Although the "Senator" does not get into his "ham shack" as much as he used to, he still does listen to radio



communications. I asked Senator Goldwater if he had a scanner. "Oh yes," he replied. "I have a Bearcat in the house." What do you listen to? I asked. "I mostly listen to the military communications from nearby bases, but sometimes I will tune into the local police and fire communications," he said.

I left Senator Goldwater thinking how lucky I was to meet such a pioneer in radio communications. Oh, he is not a Marconi as far as the development of radio system is concerned, but he has kept ham radio and the radio hobby in general in the spotlight. The radio hobby lost a true champion when he retired from the Senate.

I also found it interesting to note that this radio pioneer and electronic hobbyist's rights leader had a whole room dedicated to his radio equipment. It is, in a way, a room dedicated to history. However, the one piece of radio communications equipment the "Senator" uses is not in the radio room at all, but in the close confines of his residence. It is his Bearcat scanner.